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NEWSBEAT/Black Hebrews II

American Blacks, Jews intervene with Israel

By JOAN BORSTEN

"The State of Israel is racist to the core...we call for a full boycott of Israel, its products, and its tourist ventures." — Asiel Ben Israel, "Minister of the Hebrew Nation of Israelites," in an interview with the "New York Amsterdam News," October 1977.

SOON AFTER his arrival in Israel in March 1970, Ben-Ami Carter, the spiritual leader of the Black Hebrews, made it clear to Israelites that his followers were not, as some rabbis stated, "dark-skinned brethren who practised Judaism according to Ashkenazi tradition." No, they were Hebrew Israelites, a "nation" whose identity, culture, history and language had been stolen by those who call themselves Jews.

Carter announced to all who would listen that there was a world conspiracy to conceal from his followers their true identity as the original Hebrews of the Bible. At a series of press conferences he laid claim to the land of Israel "to the fullest extent of its biblical boundaries," declared that a million more Black Hebrews were getting ready to "come home" to Israel, and predicted that Armageddon would occur in September 1977.

After a period of catastrophe, pestilence, and famine, he declared, the Black Hebrews would be restored to God's favour and world leadership. From their capital in Jerusalem, "Northeast Africa," Carter prophesied, the Blacks would be a guiding light for the African continent and the entire world. He himself would lead them as the messiah.

Black Hebrews who had arrived in Israel before him and had become amenable to conversion were brought back into line, and friendships with "non-believers" were terminated. Any attempts by cult members to integrate into Israeli society were discouraged by Carter. Children were withdrawn from government schools in order to be educated in the ways of the "Kingdom of God." Relations between Jews and Blacks deteriorated as the cult appropriated public bomb shelters for classrooms, maternity wards, and wedding halls. The group's rock band, "The Soul Messengers," practised until late each night, ignoring complaints from neighbours.

The Black Hebrews also mounted what locals described as a "hate and terror campaign." After the Housing and Absorption Ministries refused to

allocate them additional apartments (because they were not citizens or immigrants), Blacks attempted forcefully to occupy several flats and then an agricultural site opposite Kibbutz Beit Kama.

WHEN THE Interior Ministry refused to issue special work permits for them (because they were in the country as tourists) 30 Blacks, watched by a television team and foreign correspondents, entered a Dimona supermarket, filled their baskets with approximately \$1,000 worth of goods, and refused to pay the bill. Derogatory remarks about the Israelites were coupled with anti-Semitic comments and charges that the "whites" were impostors.

The local press dismissed Carter as a trouble-maker and a crackpot, but in the international media the preacher made headlines as the spokesman of a group of Black "Jews" discriminated against by the "racist" Israelites, "forced" by the government to live 20 per flat, "banned" from public schools and public health facilities.

In the U.S., individual cult members who had been deported from Israel or turned back at the airport mounted a parallel public relations campaign, taking their

case to the Black press, the Commission for the Elimination of Racism, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, and the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Palestinians.

The "New York Amsterdam News," the largest circulation Black newspaper in the U.S., frequently reported the anti-Israel charges and supported the cult editorially. Black radio station in Chicago devoted many evenings to the group, and, according to one source, "made constant references to 'Brother Sadat' and his 'coming war to kill the evil beast,' while pledging further efforts to 'join the nation in Dimona'."

Israeli *hasbara* efforts to American Black communities were torpedoed. Moshe Gilboa, the Israeli Consul-General in Atlanta, complained that the "furor over the case of the Black Hebrews had harmed Israel's image among Negroes in the American South" and had also harmed "the good relations which exist between Jews and Blacks in the South."

THE ANTI-SEMITIC, anti-Israel crusade was documented by the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai

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"Jerusalem Post", January 21, 1979

Americans intervene for Black Hebrews

(Continued from page 1)

B'rit in New York. Included in the thick pile of newspaper clippings — some from the "New York Times," "Chicago Tribune," "Chicago Sun Times," "Miami Herald," "Baltimore Sun," and "New York Daily Mirror" — are flyers published for dissemination in the ghettos, pamphlets, and a letter written in December 1973 to all Black congressmen by Shaleak Ben Yehuda, one of the sect's two founders and then the Black Hebrew's "Chargé d'Affaires" in Jerusalem.

"The Black Community in America should be aware that the government of the United States has allocated the Jewish State of Israel in its present crisis over two thousand billion dollars," wrote Ben Yehuda. "A great percentage of this figure consists of Black America's tax dollars. This has brought about economic hardships on Black Americans and has reduced the social programmes geared toward the Black community's survival. In addition, the eight hundred million dollars raised by the United Jewish Appeal for the recent Yom Kippur War was given primarily by Jewish merchants in America whose businesses survive solely from economic exploitation of the Black community."

Shaleak concluded with a call for the total economic boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses, the creation of a Black congressional lobby aimed at denying further funds to Israel "for use against Black Americans living in Israel," and "an immediate and complete investigation and release of Black Hebrews now jailed and held incommunicado in Ramle prison."

In his book, "Black Hebrew Israelites from America to the Promised Land," published in 1976, Ben Yehuda repeated — and elaborated on — these allegations.

Another item in the ADL files is an October 1977 "Amsterdam News" interview with Asiel Ben Israel, "Minister of the Hebrew Nation of Israelites," who charges that the 1,000 Blacks living in Dimona are "kept in total, complete isolation — they cannot leave, and any person who tries to visit them is refused entry. If they persist, they are jailed and deported as were we."

It is significant that this is the most recent clipping of its sort in the ADL file. In the last 12 months the Black Hebrews have refrained from attacking the State of Israel and its "racist" policies.

ACCORDING to authoritative sources, the Black Hebrews' silence is the result of a meeting held last November in Dimona with Bayard Rustin, one of Israel's strongest supporters in the American Black community. Rustin reportedly told Carter to change his tone, and promised to take the cult's case to his friends at the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Conference, and the ADL.

In February 1978, rather than lose Rustin's support, the three Jewish organizations took the unprecedented step of writing a critical letter to Interior Minister Burg. (Some ADL leaders, among them Arnold Forster, general counsel, opposed their organization's decision to write the letter, saying the Black Hebrews were an internal Israeli affair.) Stating that the Black Hebrew problem "has already been utilized by enemies of Israel to falsely raise allegations of racism and to embarrass Black Americans who have been outspokenly committed to Israel's support," the letter outlined a series of recommendations:

- The community should be allowed to join the Histadrut (and be entitled to all the employment, medical and cultural benefits, including

assistance with the booking and business aspects of the "Soul Messengers."

- There should be a discussion with the Interior Ministry as to the feasibility of relocating the Black Hebrews on a kibbutz where they could produce "vegetarian food" for the cities of Israel.

- Former members of the Dimona community who have been deported, but still have wives and children in Dimona, should be allowed brief visits to their families prior to the resolution of the problem.

- Both the government and the leadership of the Dimona community should refrain from making critical statements for a period of six months.

As a result of this letter, which was never acknowledged by Burg, the Histadrut extended membership facilities to the Black Hebrews. And on March 7, 1978, thoroughly reformed, conciliatory Shaleak Ben Yehuda (author of the 1973 letter to Black congressmen), informed Rustin and "other participants in the Dimona conference" that "both communities in the land of Israel...are now coming together in one spirit, a spirit of righteousness...moving in this direction our communities can be goodwill ambassadors in Israel and the Jewish communities, speaking in synagogues on an international level throughout the world."

The Shaleak memorandum states that the Black Hebrews:

- accept Histadrut membership "as a show of devotion at this point in our history";
- wish to be accepted fully as citizens of the State of Israel with all the rights and responsibilities this implies;
- agree to insist that any new members go through the "normal immigration" procedures required of all new citizens of Israel;

- agree to refrain from critical comments for seven months.

Bernard Resnikoff, the Israeli representative of the American Jewish Committee, attributes the Black Hebrews' volte-face to a genuine change in attitude. Carter says Resnikoff, is not the same belligerent spokesman of two years ago. Now he is friendly, affable, pacific, reasonable.

Both Forster, who has interviewed the Black Hebrews for *American* radio and visited them in Dimona, and Zev Furst, director of the ADL's Israel office, have not been convinced that "any meaningful change has occurred in the attitude of the Black Hebrews toward Israel and the Jews." "We wish it were otherwise," says Furst.

The third instalment of this series, will appear tomorrow.

Cult's critics charge secrecy, strictness and 'brainwashing'

Jerusalem Post Staff

THEIR GRACEFUL, turbaned women, clad in modest ankle-length gowns, radiate an inner peace. The tall, athletic men, wearing distinctive knitted skullcaps and fringed African-style dashikis, perform even the most menial of tasks with a sense of purpose. The children are carbon copies of their exotic parents — happy, healthy and bursting with self-confidence.

Yet interviews with former cult members, interviews with some of the Americans, Israelis, and Black Jews who have been allowed to observe the community, indicate that life in the Black Hebrews' "Kingdom of God" may not be all that sublime. The rules are strict, compliance mandatory, dissent not tolerated, and discipline severe. In the past two years there have been claims, some of which have reached the press, of unresolved disappearances, involuntary confinement, child brutality, confiscated resources and passports, and extreme paranoia among the sect's leadership.

"At first being with the Dimona group was very good," remembers M., a former Black Hebrew. "I thought it would work out. Most people were like me, black Jews or blacks who considered themselves Jews. What we wanted was to stay in the Land. I don't know about the others, but even in the States I did quite a bit to campaign for Israel when it first got started.

"Things started to change a few years before that 1977 deadline, which they said was going to mean the end of the world (Ben-Ami Carter, spiritual leader of the Black Hebrews had predicted a War of Armageddon which would destroy the forces of evil and restore his sect to world power). The place got crowded with lots of newcomers, different from us. They started crowning Carter messiah, putting his picture up on the wall. They'd tell people to believe in them and what they were doing, brainwashing them, getting their minds and controlling them. They'd get on you real bad.

"They started this polygamy

thing, letting the men take up to seven wives, and never letting the old wives get used to it. People were beaten if they whined about going to work or if they were lazy. Children, too. Or they'd tell them 'go' and put them out for 40 days to wander in the desert. Or we'd all go to this mountain near Dimona and he'd make the people step forward, if they'd been asking 'why this' or 'why that'. You can't ask questions. A lot goes on you just aren't supposed to know about. Carter would pretend he was going to run those people out. Then they'd start crying and saying, 'someone have mercy upon me'."

Other observers of the sect also noted that the group has changed significantly since members first arrived in Israel in late 1969. Some of those who preceded Carter to Israel, for instance, considered themselves Jews and some even had agreed to undergo halachic conversion.

It is also clear that, until at least 1973, the Black Hebrew communities in Arad and Mitzpe Ramon functioned autonomously from Dimona. Arad was even considered by some observers to be a breakaway group. It was friction among the three communities that led to the 1972 "Axe Murder." Cult members from Arad and Mitzpe Ramon, wanting to join Carter, were rejected on the grounds that a new influx of believers would "aggravate" Dimona's problems. A clash, involving six Black Hebrews, followed and resulted in the death from hatchet wounds of Cornell Kirkpatrick. Relations were apparently so strained following the murder that some Black Hebrews in Arad and Mitzpe Ramon asked the Israeli police for protection against their fellow sectarians from Dimona.

It seems that only after the murder did Carter and his second-in-command, Ben-Yehuda, move to consolidate the three Black Hebrew communities under one rule. They brought in new recruits loyal to their philosophy and encouraged the departure of those who could not make the transition from Black Jew (a religion) to Black Hebrew (a nationality). Many left the group. At the same time, Carter, proclaiming

himself the "messiah born of the spirit with no mother like other mothers," and Ben-Yehuda, "endowed by the Holy Ghost," tightened their hold over the group.

They became stricter about matters of dress and drugs. Cigarettes and liquor (except wine) were forbidden. In Liberia, the members had become quasi-vegetarians. Now they were prohibited from eating fowl, fish, meat, dairy products, refined sugar, or soya. Everyone was expected to fast on the Sabbath, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Movies were banned because of excessive sex and violence.

Gentile or "slave" names were dropped and appropriate Hebrew names adopted. Many Black Hebrews do not know the original names under which their coreligionists entered the country.

The sect was also organized as a collective. Originally, the group had lived one or two families per flat. Now up to 20 people shared an apartment, pooled their resources and salaries.

"About that time they stopped letting you read books or newspapers or listen to the radio anymore," says M.

Cult members were encouraged to withdraw from all but essential contacts with Israelis. All outsiders came to be viewed as suspect, and in particular those who had "stolen" the Black Hebrews' true identity, namely the Israelis.

Morris Lounds, Jr., the Black American political scientist who wrote his doctoral thesis on the cult, had interviewed half of the Black Hebrew adults when he was accused of being a spy, although an unwitting one, for the enemies of the Black Hebrews. He was not permitted to complete his research.

An internal police force was organized to guard the Dimona flats. Lounds reports that the cult leadership believed the Israeli government, American authorities, and "forces of evil" were conspiring to bring about the cult's destruction. He also says children were taught how to behave in the presence of outsiders and drilled on the "correct"

answers to questions they might be asked.

Today, observers say, the Black Hebrews have so withdrawn into themselves that neither the Interior Ministry nor the police, nor even their neighbours in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon, can say with assurance that they have any real knowledge about the group's internal activities.

The authorities do not know the exact number of Black Hebrews living in Israel. They do not know how many children have been born here. Neighbours say that the mothers deliver babies in the bomb shelters under their flats while tom-tom drums are beaten outside to muffle the cries of women in labour.

The exact number of deaths of group members is not known outside. The Ministry of Health office in Beersheba has signed three death certificates in ten years, but the Dimona chief of police, Uri Shalev, thinks there are about 20 graves belonging to the Black Hebrews in their cemetery outside Dimona.

The Israeli residents in Dimona's Shikun Nitzahon are generally reluctant to talk about their Black Hebrew neighbours. When asked, they complain about noise and overcrowding.

One Dimona housewife, who for eight years has shared a common entrance with some Black Hebrews, was more outspoken: "I just don't want to know much about them. Like everyone else here, I'm scared," she said. "I just mind my own business." She claims that some of the members have disappeared, and that she has seen bodies carried outside late at night. This claim was included in the High Court brief and was also reported to the Glass Commission. "We see people with their heads shaved. We saw a man the other day cleaning the patio area on his hands and knees with a tiny broom. It was his punishment for a week. But we don't know what's going on. They are really tight-lipped. They wouldn't tell us anything if we asked."

The daily lives of the sect members (900 in Dimona, 400 in

Arad, 100 in Mitzpe Ramon, and 20 in Ellat) are directed by a divine council of 12 "princes," each symbolically representing one of the ancient tribes of Israel. The princes are appointed to the council by Carter. Lounds writes that they are apparently subservient to Carter's wishes and that decisions are arrived at through consensus rather than by majority. The "divine council," it seems, is responsible for the continuous transfer of Black Hebrews between the three localities. (Israelis in Arad say that they have difficulty knowing the identity of their Black neighbours because of the frequent changes. One who lives above a Black Hebrew flat says that its occupants are completely rotated twice a month.)

In Dimona the group maintains an internal security force headed by a minister of defence. A justice minister metes out punishment to those who transgress the group's laws. An interior minister issues "temporary" identity cards that look official; Negev police have been under the assumption that the cards were printed by the Israeli government.

An education minister runs the "Kingdom School." Although Black Hebrew children are free to attend Dimona public schools, they do not do so.

The sect also trains its own midwives, carries out circumcisions, and administers herbal cures for various illnesses. Antibiotics are not permitted and diseases are treated by faith healing.

A finance minister is in charge of the communal budget. Observers of the group say that the revenue is derived from performances and record albums by the rock band, profits from the sale of jewelry and leather goods produced by the group, contributions from friends and family abroad, U.S. social security payments received by individual members, and paychecks from members employed by Israeli concerns. Some of the men work at Arad and Dimona textile mills, the Dead Sea Works (or "Live Sea" as it is

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called by the group), and in construction crews. According to some sources, new members are required to transfer control of their American credit cards, bank accounts and property to the sect.

Former members of the group have said that followers must also turn over official documents, such as passports, to the leadership. Black Hebrews who have left the group asked the U.S. Embassy to replace "lost" passports.

"Without a passport it is difficult for an American black to make it in Israel, unless he is living with the group," explains a source close to the sect. "By taking the passports, Carter has even a stronger hold over the members. The interior ministry never deports any Black living in Dimona."

Carter's deputies also control the activities of the group's branches in the two satellite communities. Charles Blackwell is the leader in Arad. He alone deals with the government, the police, banks, and landlords. The first Black Hebrew to arrive in Israel, Blackwell possesses a legitimate Israeli identity card.

The leader of the Mitzpe Ramon community is Gabriel Ben-Israel. There, male members are employed by the municipality to clean the

streets and gardens. Ben-Israel assigns the city Black Hebrew manpower and also collects all pay cheques.

When the Glass Commission arrived in Mitzpe Ramon recently on its fact-finding tour, it asked permission to meet with local members of the group. Permission was denied because Ben-Israel was not in town and could not be consulted. Neither Blackwell nor Ben-Israel can be interviewed unless permission is first secured from Dimona.

Many single black women join the cult seeking just this kind of extremely structured, highly organized, male-dominated way of life that emphasizes a strict moral code. They themselves are often the products of broken homes and divorces. Some end up leaving, however, when they discover that among the Black Hebrews, women have status inferior to men and are separated, at least informally, during ritual worship and communal activities.

"All women are expected to do is cook, clean, take care of the children, sleep with their husbands, and produce one baby each year," says M.

In Dimona, Israeli neighbours complain about child-beating among the blacks. They report that

children, even, toddlers, who innocently accept candy, ice cream or other forbidden foods from Israelis are beaten severely, as are youngsters who whimper or cry. "They start punishing them for crying when they aren't even old enough to know better," says one Dimona resident.

A professional in the health field, who has been close to members of the group, describes as child abuse some of the disciplinary measures meted out by cult members in an effort to insure that the children comply with the "Divine Behaviour." He claims that one child he personally knows was locked in a bomb shelter for a prolonged period of time, suffering mental damage as a result.

One former member was attracted to the sect because she believed the men would provide her sons with positive male role models: "They don't have crime or juvenile delinquency in the group," she says. "The problem is they are too strict. Half of those people are aggravated: they're in this thing, they've got to stay in, so they take it out on the kids. They never talk to a child. Right away they are ready to beat them. And when they do, they beat the children for hours," she claims.

Several Israelis have reported that members of the group who wanted to leave it were afraid of the conse-

quences. They asked Israelis for temporary shelter and help.

"We helped a woman who had been locked up once for drinking liquor. She was terrified," a former Sherut La'am volunteer in Dimona recalls. "She wanted out because, she said, the women there are treated like slaves. She was also frightened. So we hid this woman in our flat, supplied her clothes, and got her to Tel Aviv where an Israeli helped her leave the country."

A former member recently said that some members of the group would leave if they could, but are not strong enough to do so. "Some just want to live in Israel. They could work in factories, live in kibbutzim and farms," she said. "But the leaders got hold of the people's minds."

The Glass Commission is aware of some of these allegations, but tends to disregard them. Zvi Zilker, mayor of Ashdod and a member of the commission, said: "We aren't interested in what goes on inside the Black Hebrew community. Our frame of reference is determined by the appeal to the Supreme Court by a Dimona citizens committee. Our job is to find a solution that will put an end to the friction which has arisen in Dimona between the Israelis and the Black Hebrews."

(To be continued)

By HARRY WALL

TO HIS 1,400 followers he is called, alternatively, the Prince of Peace, the Chosen Prophet, and the Messiah. To the Israeli authorities and the residents of Dimona he is known as Ben-Ami Carter, spokesman and undisputed leader of the Black Hebrews.

No real understanding of the hermetically-sealed cult can be had without some insight into the man who shapes its self image (and their view of the "decadent world" outside), is the ultimate authority over its rigid disciplinary and educational systems, and who offers peace of mind and eternal salvation to his troubled followers in exchange for their independence.

To interview Carter it is necessary to pass through measures of protocol not unlike those reserved for a head of state. Arrangements must be made well in advance through a "spokesman" and reporters are carefully screened for proper credentials.

"You would not expect to meet the

president of any other nation without strict procedures," says El Yakim Ben Israel in Dimona's Shikunat Nitzahon, where the group is headquartered. El Yakim, a tall and muscular former college basketball player, is the "Divine Minister of Finance," one of the sect's council of twelve elders appointed by Carter to administer the affairs of the "mini-nation."

The courtyard of the shikun is filled with the scent of raw sewage, the daily accumulation of densely-packed apartments housing 20 or more members per unit. Later in the morning the waste will be cleaned up by a sanitation crew of the sect, which has strict rules concerning personal hygiene.

On the concrete benches are seated young black women dressed in colourful dashikis and flowing jallabias, their blissful countenances striking an incongruous note amidst the squalid environs. Young males passing by exchange greetings in Hebrew flowing lyrically to the cadences of black English.

After presenting my press credentials, which are carefully scrutinized by El Yakim and another man, I am taken to a second-floor apartment in the neighbourhood and led through a curtain into a sitting room. It is sparsely furnished with a few wicker chairs, a small table carved from a tree trunk, and some African knick-knacks, remnants of time spent in Liberia. There is no indication of overcrowding as by day the sleeping mats are rolled up and the children are outside playing.

The room is spotless, and the aroma of fresh vegetables being prepared for lunch wafts from the kitchen. Carter is not there.

Newsbeat/Black Hebrews IV



Ben-Ami Carter, leader of the Black Hebrews, with followers in Dimona. (David Rubinger)

The normally secretive sect members are even more suspicious as I had arrived the day after a national police report on the Black

Hebrews was leaked to the press, alleging bizarre behaviour and criminal activities by the group. Following a thorough, but polite,

interrogation of my aims, I am told that Carter will soon be coming.

How, I ask, was Carter chosen to lead the group. "You know the deliverer by his works," El Yakim cryptically answers.

"What are the works?"

"He has led us out of the land of oppression (USA) and from the Liberian wilderness to the Promised Land," says the bearded sectarian. "And he has purged us of our bad habits and superstitions. He is our Moses."

The conversation is periodically interrupted by a young man, presumably in direct contact with Carter, who has additional questions about my visit. A corpulent woman quietly serves tea flavoured with honey (refined sugar is prohibited by the sect's dietary laws), and I spend the remaining time discussing the group's economics with the "minister of finance."

Presently, Carter enters the room unannounced, dressed in a blue dashiki and a white turban wrapped around his afro-cut hair. I am startled by his youthful appearance and delicate features, not what I had imagined for the omnipotent head of the group.

Carter is a handsome, bearded man of slight build, sharp profile accentuated by high cheekbones, and long, slender fingers. His almond-shaped green eyes radiate warmth and gentleness. His manner of speech is soft and precise. He chooses his words carefully and responds patiently to questions. A man accustomed to deference, he bears himself with undeniable authority.

For the purposes of the interview,

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Jerusalem Post Jan. 28, 1979

BLACK HEBREWS DIMONA CARTER

(Continued from page 1)

Carter admits to being 38 years old, but he dismisses age as irrelevant because of his belief in immortality.

"We are phasing out death and are on the path toward solving the mysteries of everlasting life," he says simply. "The Bible shows that some of the prophets lived to be 900 years old. I am positive that, following the way of righteousness, some of our people will live to be 600."

Shifting easily from mystical beliefs to present concerns, Carter strongly denies all the allegations of criminal conduct in the sect. "They are completely false," he declares flatly. "They smack of the same kind of police attitude and discrimination displayed toward black people in America."

"If there is something to the report, why haven't the police come to us," he declares. "Isay, check our record, and then put the cards on the table," his voice rising for the first time.

He does admit, however, that members of the sect have entered the country under illegal circumstances, using false passports or intentionally staying after their tourist visas have expired.

"When a man is fleeing from the land of oppression, he will take whatever measures he can to join the Kingdom of God," (This is the term used by the Black Hebrews to describe their movement.)

Carter compares the illegal entries of his followers to similar tactics used by Jewish refugees during the Mandatory period. "They had to throw their passports overboard when the British inspected the immigrant ships."

What about neighbours who claim to hear loud screams from the bombshelters?

"The shelters are where our women deliver their babies. Sometimes the mothers shriek from the pain," he replies.

Carter denies that members wishing to leave the group are held against their will.

"We do have some 'yerida'," he says, "but only try to stop drop-outs by moral persuasion. And if we can't convince them to remain, we will even take them to the airport."

Carter claims that the new members arrive in Israel impoverished. "All they bring are empty pockets, hearts of pain, and a multitude of problems." He disavows receiving large sums of money from the United States or, as has been alleged, from Arab nations.

"Our condition is known in high places and we do have people in sympathy with our movement. But we neither seek, nor desire, money from abroad. Money only confuses things," he adds. "But anyone who can, pays 'tithes' of 10 per cent of his earnings to the community."

Carter has repeatedly stated his belief in his group's ultimate ascendancy to the power structure in Israel. He is miffed about being left out of the Middle East peace talks. "How can (Jimmy) Carter and Begin conduct negotiations about the future of this land without taking us into consideration," he asks in all earnestness.

"The problem is not with the Egyptians or Palestinians," he continues. "It is that we are chosen for a special mission — to bring righteousness to the world. The first step toward that is the establishment of the Kingdom of God here in Israel, from which righteousness will emanate to all the nations."

The concern with "righteousness" looms large in Carter's thoughts and appears to stand for the set of beliefs that separates the Black Hebrews from the evil institutions and decadent societies outside.

The crisis in Iran was also predictable according to the Carter worldview. "Iran is caught up in the prophecies of God. The guiding prophecies from the Bible have taken the people there along their path."

Carter's belief in his ability to help shape world events has apparently grown with the increased control he has exercised in recent years to galvanize his followers.

"My role has evolved and changed progressively," he says. "I have a prophetic mission to fulfil. To establish the Kingdom of God."

Strong words from a man who, ten years ago, was a storefront preacher in Chicago's southside.

Very little is known about Carter's American past. According to an authoritative source, he was born Gerson Parker and raised in the ghettos of north Chicago. Following a trade school education he worked for a while as a metallurgist.

This information was discovered by Morris Lounds, the black American sociologist who lived for a time with the Dimona group and wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the sect. According to Lounds, Parker's (Carter) rendezvous with his prophetic destiny came one day in Chicago when an elderly man approached him at a water fountain and asked if he had heard of the an-

cient Black Israelites.

This apparently was the "sign" that moved Carter to organize the Black Hebrew movement at the Abelta Culture Center, one of the many evangelical churches dotting the Chicago ghettos. There, members were recruited for the journey into the Liberian "wilderness" in preparation for deliverance to the Promised Land. It has, from the beginning, been a fundamental tenet of the group that the first and only authentic Israelites were black people who were exiled from Israel over 4,000 years ago. It was the mission of the pioneering nucleus to restore the land to its proper owners.

Carter arrived in Dimona in 1970 with the third group of families and soon after assumed control as the self-designated messiah. "No man can pass into salvation of the almighty God except he come by the door. And I am that door," Lounds quoted Carter as saying. It is not clear why he changed his name to Carter, although Lounds attributed this to a belief in a mystical past wherein the sect leader had been reincarnated several times with different names.

The pattern of Carter's rise, then, parallels that of charismatic leaders of other autocratic cults. From obscure origins he has risen to a position of absolute authority, serving as guru and father figure to his unquestioning acolytes by means of an unchallenged claim to divine inspiration.

Carter's present concern is to get the group out of the overcrowded apartments in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon. "We would like to have our own agricultural settlement where we can raise organically-grown fruits and vegetables," he says. "We also want the rights and privileges of other citizens living in Israel."

Indications are that the Glass Commission (the public inquiry body headed by MK David Glass looking into the matter of the Black Hebrews) favours a similar solution, probably a settlement somewhere in the Arava. Under this arrangement the group would be given mobile homes, electricity, water and presumably the same government assistance extended to other settlements.

The commission would also recommend giving legal residency status to those Black Hebrews presently living in Israel.

In exchange for this arrangement, Carter has committed himself to

preventing new members from joining the sect, in a bid to stop arrival of illegal immigrants are the only ones that know who (prospective members) are. I keep to our end of the bargain," declares.

Carter, who acknowledges having three wives and fifteen children, sidesteps the question of stopping the group's practice of polygamy, is contrary to Israeli law. "Polygamy is a negative term by the West to describe a primitive African civilization. We find it strange that a man has to whom we can't control," he criticizes the high rate of divorce in Western societies. "We do not want divorce in our kingdom."

Would the group be willing recruiting fellow blacks to the United States if given a settlement and legal residency as the Commission may recommend? Carter affirms that it would, instead of proselytizing America. "We will grow from and by conversions to the movement by others who have seen righteousness of our ways."

In previous statements in the press, Carter has declared "there are two million Israelites in America waiting to come home soon." Despite the exaggerated figure there are many Americans who have urged to join the Israeli community.

Carter is convinced that his prophetic messianic mission will be recognized through the land. It's realization, he will not depend upon coercion. The movement will spread naturally as others recognize the righteousness of our ways." Righteousness is adherence to the group's doctrines of vegetarianism, faith he abstains from smoking, alcoholic beverages and using pharmaceutical drugs, and complete isolation from the "contaminating influences" of the outside world.

"I am positive the nation will ask us to assist in the structural changes," he declares. One of his acts in office, says Carter, was to close down the cigarette factory in the country.

What happens to those who object to the Black Hebrew movement?

"Anyone who doesn't agree with controversy with God, and I mean, answers Carter. "We intend to wait and live in peaceful coexistence with the Israelis, as ultimately they will see the wisdom of our ways and come forth to join

America."

"If there is something to the report, why haven't the police come to us," he declares. "I say, check our record, and then put the cards on the table," his voice rising for the first time.

He does admit, however, that members of the sect have entered the country under illegal circumstances, using false passports or intentionally staying after their tourist visas have expired.

"When a man is fleeing from the land of oppression, he will take whatever measures he can to join the Kingdom of God," (This is the term used by the Black Hebrews to describe their movement.)

Carter compares the illegal entries of his followers to similar tactics used by Jewish refugees during the Mandatory period. "They had to throw their passports overboard when the British inspected the immigrant ships."

What about neighbours who claim to hear loud screams from the bombshelters?

"The shelters are where our women deliver their babies. Sometimes the mothers shriek from the pain," he replies.

Carter denies that members wishing to leave the group are held against their will.

"We do have some 'yerida'," he says, "but only try to stop drop-outs by moral persuasion. And if we can't convince them to remain, we will even take them to the airport."

Carter claims that the new members arrive in Israel im-

tinues. "It is that we are chosen for a special mission — to bring righteousness to the world. The first step toward that is the establishment of the Kingdom of God here in Israel, from which righteousness will emanate to all the nations."

The concern with "righteousness" looms large in Carter's thoughts and appears to stand for the set of beliefs that separates the Black Hebrews from the evil institutions and decadent societies outside.

The crisis in Iran was also predictable according to the Carter worldview. "Iran is caught up in the prophecies of God. The guiding prophecies from the Bible have taken the people there along their path."

Carter's belief in his ability to help shape world events has apparently grown with the increased control he has exercised in recent years to galvanize his followers.

"My role has evolved and changed progressively," he says. "I have a prophetic mission to fulfil. To establish the Kingdom of God."

Strong words from a man who, ten years ago, was a storefront preacher in Chicago's southside.

Very little is known about Carter's American past. According to an authoritative source, he was born Gerson Parker and raised in the ghettoes of north Chicago. Following a trade school education he worked for a while as a metallurgist.

This information was discovered by Morris Lounds, the black American sociologist who lived for a time with the Dimona group and wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the sect

with the third group of families and soon after assumed control as the self-designated messiah. "No man can pass into salvation of the almighty God except he come by the door. And I am that door," Lounds quoted Carter as saying. It is not clear why he changed his name to Carter, although Lounds attributed this to a belief in a mythical past wherein the sect leader had been reincarnated several times with different names.

The pattern of Carter's rise, then, parallels that of charismatic leaders of other autocratic cults. From obscure origins he has risen to a position of absolute authority, serving as guru and father figure to his unquestioning acolytes by means of an unchallenged claim to divine inspiration.

Carter's present concern is to get the group out of the overcrowded apartments in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon. "We would like to have our own agricultural settlement where we can raise organically-grown fruits and vegetables," he says. "We also want the rights and privileges of other citizens living in Israel."

Indications are that the Glass Commission (the public inquiry body headed by MK David Glass looking into the matter of the Black Hebrews) favours a similar solution, probably a settlement somewhere in the Arava. Under this arrangement the group would be given mobile homes, electricity, water and presumably the same government assistance extended to other settlements.

Would the group be willing recruiting fellow blacks United States if given a set and legal residency as the Commission may recommend? Carter affirms that it won't be that, instead of proselytizing America, "We will grow from and by conversions to the me by others who have seen righteousness of our ways."

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What happens to those who object to the Black Hebrew movement?

"Anyone who doesn't see

NEWSBEAT/Black Hebrews V A settlement for the cult?

By DAVID RICHARDSON

"In Dimona, where the total population is 25,000, we cannot ignore the presence of 1,000 Black Hebrews today, and maybe double that number in five years."

MK Jacques Amir, mayor of Dimona,
January 1979

ISRAEL'S Black Hebrew communities live as a nation within a nation, apparently accountable to no one except their messianic leader, Ben-Ami Carter.

For years their neighbours have

complained about the noise they make, the overcrowded apartments, the overflowing sewers, and the decline in property values.

For years their pleas went unanswered.

Finally, seven months ago, convinced that the Interior Ministry had finally crossed the line between benign neglect and irresponsibility, a Dimona citizens' committee filed a suit in the Supreme Court against the Ministers of the Interior, Health, and Education as well as the Dimona Municipality.

The suit was — ironically — endorsed by the Blacks themselves

who were equally anxious to resolve the dilemma, preferably by being relocated in an agricultural settlement of their own.

The court did not act directly the suit. Instead, it recommended that Interior Minister Yosef Burg establish a fact-finding commission to look into the matter and recommend what steps the government should take.

Burg subsequently appointed a commission headed by MK David Glass who in the last two months visited Dimona, Arad, and Mt. Ramon to gather information from local residents and officials, as well as the sect leaders.

The commission was also presented with two police intelligence reports on the group. One of the reports, leaked to the press a few weeks ago, recommended that the group be deported because of "criminal activities and associations" of the members.

Glass claims that the police reports were largely based on assumptions, and not on any intimate knowledge of the secretive sect. It attaches considerably more importance to the opinion of the local police chiefs in Dimona and Arad who say that they have not found anything "dangerous or subversive" about the group.

A high-ranking official in national police intelligence, however, has admitted to *The Jerusalem Post* that rumours of criminal activities by the group have "never been properly investigated, as the Black Hebrews are not viewed as a major priority."

WHAT THE GLASS Commission has learned, however, is that resident complaints only point to the tip of the iceberg. The ramifications of the problems are far more complex and serious, embracing social, legal

CULT?

favour of comparisons with it," he says. "That kind of talk only reinforces such a process." If, others note, there are sects within Judaism, and is suggesting that these are "dangerous groups."

Black Hebrews are given a settlement the state will be capable of controlling what is inside, he says.

The settlement proposal is that each member or family be interviewed before being given an identity card. "If anyone wishes to leave the group or has doubts about mistreatment, that is the time to act," Glass adds that any solution must have to include an "educational programme" as well, elaborating.

It is also not specific about the practice of polygamy. He says that if they became citizens Black Hebrews would be subject to the state's laws, unless they were changed to adapt to the practices.

The commission has apparently concluded its inquiry. In a few weeks it will submit its recommendations to the Minister of

It is faced with a dilemma: commendation for a settlement would open a hornet's nest of criticism. There would be serious quarters about such a loss of land and resources. It would be feared about isolation in the cult. There would be questions of permitting a settlement in Israel which in its behaviour contravenes the general mores of the state, however widely defined.

Of course, has been the case because of government inaction. With a settlement, the state would officially sanction the cult and its behaviour

as some officials suspect, a more political tone adopted

would also be considerable political embarrassment for Glass, the Minister and the government, if the aim was achieved, Black Hebrew leaders would in future again attempt to resume their challenge against the State and the legitimacy of Zionism.

On the other hand, the commission certainly feels the presence of residents of Dimona and Arad who want the Blacks removed. The Interior to pursue its favour of a settlement policy.

And it feels the pressure on Blacks who also find their circumstances intolerable. Plainly therefore the question of the Black Hebrews can no longer be ignored. The government is compelled to deal with it at the highest level.

Oddly, however, it will be upon to consider granting a settlement and legitimacy to a cult which shares the characteristics — as listed one week in the "New York Times" — of most cults now under increased suspicion in the U.S.:

1. They have a charismatic leader who says he has been given exclusive revelations about reality. Those who do not believe are considered not only wrong, but dangerous.
2. The leader creates a family, a communal living arrangement. Members often take new wives when they join and sever ties with their families.
3. The leader sets absolute rules, necessarily following them.
4. The group has an apocalyptic world view, in which more may be discarded in the near future.
5. Certain behaviour-control techniques are practised, usually involving isolation from the outside world. Members see the techniques as religious regimen. Outside the group is brainwashing.

The oddity is the price the government will have to pay for the failures of its predecessors — Burg, the Interior Minister, have even such an excuse.



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(Continued on page 4, col. 3)

(Continued from page 1)

and, ultimately, political problems such as the sensitive issue of settlement.

In a discussion with *The Post*, Glass elaborated on the options facing his commission.

He first is not to do anything that would affect the status quo. This would be the least desirable (though not the most improbable) option as far as the Israelis of Dimona, and Mitzpe Ramon, and the Blacks themselves are concerned.

One alternative is to remove the Blacks from their congested quarters and disperse them throughout Israel. But this, too, is unacceptable to the group as it does not take into account their communal life style.

A third possibility is to deport them from Israel. This is the least desirable option as expulsion would most certainly provoke protests at home and abroad. "As a Jew, I find it difficult to accept that our people have suffered for generations because they were a strange minority," would behave in such a fashion," says Glass.

The final option is to give the Black Hebrews the agricultural settlement first asked for in 1971.

The Post has learned that the Glass Commission is in fact likely to recommend this. Glass himself is said to have reached an agreement with sect leader Ben-Ami Carter. In exchange for the establishment of a settlement, and the rights and privileges of Israeli residency, Carter would guarantee that no new members would be allowed to join the group.

Underlying the commission's approach is an acute awareness of the political ramifications of the problems, which transcend Israel's borders and affect relations between the Jewish and Black communities in U.S.

The Israeli government's position or lack of one — has prompted charges of discrimination and anti-Semitism by the Black Hebrews and their American supporters. The deportation of illegal immigrants and the harassment of innocent Black tourists who were suspected of

planning to join the sect have fuelled anti-Israel sentiment in the American media, which have generally portrayed the Black Hebrews as a harmless group who want to exercise their rights as Jews and live in Israel.

The government is sensitive to the nuances of the problem in the U.S. and Glass has met with representatives of American Jewish organizations as part of his commission's inquiry.

Bernard Resnikoff, the local representative of the American Jewish Committee, says: "It is proper for a sovereign state to think through the international implications of its decisions."

In Israel, sympathy for the plight of the sect has been diminished by their steadily mounting demands for the privileges of legal residence without a willingness to assume the concomitant obligations.

It seems clear that the Black Hebrews are not interested in serving in the army, attending government schools, paying taxes, or abiding by public health regulations.

Several Israeli officials interviewed by *The Post* say that they suspect criminal behaviour within the secretive cult, doubt their loyalty to the state and would like to see them deported immediately.

Glass, who opposes expulsion, mentions the legal problem that this would create. "Many of the Black Hebrews have unilaterally renounced their American citizenship and have destroyed their passports in certain cases. Technically, they are stateless and expulsion begs the question, 'Where to?'"

Not back to the United States. At least not the 66 sect members who have formally renounced their American citizenship at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv. (Destroying passports is irrelevant and insufficient for forfeiting citizenship. According to a senior consular official at the embassy, the United States is not at all reluctant to take back anyone who has not renounced his citizenship.)

But the stateless blacks are

Israel's problem. This raises the question: Why should the host country be responsible for keeping an alien who remains in the country illegally and decides to relinquish his citizenship?

According to the consular official, the U.S. embassy sees the problem of the Black Hebrews as "an internal matter" which Israel must solve. The embassy can only act as an intermediary in bringing some of the complaints of the group to the attention of the Israeli authorities, said the official.

The official acknowledged that the embassy does keep in touch with the group — a consular officer periodically visits them in Dimona — but only because "it is a sizable concentration of Americans living in Israel."

One aim of the visits to Dimona is to investigate appeals by U.S. citizens that family members have left home and may be living with Black Hebrews in Israel.

WHILE THE Glass Commission has been thorough in investigating the group's relations with the surrounding communities and the international dimensions of the problem, it has not shown an equal interest in probing the Black Hebrews' internal affairs.

Glass believes that allegations of bizarre cult behaviour, harsh discipline, and cruelty to members are largely unfounded. The committee is also not interested in investigating the personal backgrounds of the Blacks.

Yet there are those, aware of the Glass Commission's readiness to consider a settlement as a solution, who are opposed to such a step.

The fear that isolating the Black Hebrews in a desert settlement would only further remove them from the scrutiny of public authorities, making it more difficult to control their conduct. As in the U.S., so among these officials as well, the spectre of what happened in Jonestown, Guyana has had an impact.

But Glass feels differently. "I am

not in favour of comparisons with Guyana," he says. "That kind of talk can only reinforce such a process." Moreover, others note, there are similar sects within Judaism, and nobody is suggesting that these are potentially dangerous groups."

If the Black Hebrews are given their own settlement the state will be quite capable of controlling what goes on inside, he says.

If the settlement proposal is adopted, each member or family would be interviewed before being issued an identity card. "If anyone does wish to leave the group or has complaints about mistreatment, that would be the time to act," Glass says. He adds that any solution would have to include an "educational programme" as well, without elaborating.

Glass is also not specific about the group's practice of polygamy. He asserts that if they became citizens "the Black Hebrews would be subject to the state's laws, unless the laws were changed to adapt to the group's practices."

The commission has apparently already concluded its inquiry. Within a few weeks it will submit its recommendations to the Minister of Interior.

Certainly it is faced with a dilemma. A recommendation for a settlement would open a hornet's nest of problems. There would be criticism from various quarters about such allocation of land and resources. There would be fears about isolation of a strange cult. There would be serious questions of permitting a group to live in Israel which in its internal behaviour contravenes the law — as in the practice of polygamy — and the general mores of the society, however widely defined.

This, of course, has been the case until now, because of government indecisiveness. With a settlement, the government would officially sanction the cult and its behaviour patterns.

And if, as some officials suspect, the moderate political tone adopted by the group in the last few months is only an expedient ruse to help ad-

dress the settlement issue, there would also be considerable political embarrassment for Glass, the commission and the government, if after the aim was achieved, Black Hebrew leaders would in future again be tempted to resume their charges against the State and the legitimacy of Zionism.

On the other hand, the commission certainly feels the pressure of the residents of Dimona and Arad, who want the Blacks removed. They will no longer permit the Ministry of Interior to pursue its favourite doing nothing policy.

And it feels the pressure of the Blacks who also find their present circumstances intolerable.

Plainly therefore the question of the Black Hebrews can no longer be ignored. The government will be compelled to deal with it at the highest level.

Oddly, however, it will be called upon to consider granting support and legitimacy to a cult which shares the fundamental characteristics — as listed only this week in the "New York Times" — of most cults now under increasing suspicion in the U.S.:

1. They have a charismatic leader who says he has been given new, exclusive revelations about God or reality. Those who do not believe are considered not only wrong, but evil.
2. The leader creates a family, often a communal living arrangement. Members often take new names when they join and sever ties with their families.
3. The leader sets absolute rules, not necessarily following them himself.
4. The group has an apocalyptic world view, in which moral rules may be discarded in the service of the leader.
5. Certain behaviour-control techniques are practised, usually in a setting isolated from the outside world. Members see the techniques as a religious regimen. Outsiders call them brainwashing.

The oddity is the price the present government will have to pay for the failures of its predecessors — but Dr. Burg, the Interior Minister, will not have even such an excuse.

(This is the concluding article in this five-part series.)